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UNCLAS YEREVAN 000772

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR EUR/CACEN

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY RATIFIES NATO PFP SOFA

1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

2. (SBU) The Armenian National Assembly ratified the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) March 31. The GOAM signed the agreement on October 28, 2003. Under Armenian law, the agreement goes into effect with no further Presidential action necessary. In a meeting with us today, Defense Minister Serge Sargsyan noted that the SOFA ratification was an important step for Armenia's increased cooperation with NATO and further participation in PfP activities.

3. (SBU) Comment: The GOAM clearly considers the signing and ratification of the SOFA agreement as a significant step towards strengthening its defense cooperation ties with NATO and the United States. Along with the SOFA ratification, Armenia hosted the Cooperative Best Effort 03 exercises in June 2003 and deployed peacekeepers to NATO's KFOR operation in Kosovo, and MOD sources told us March 30 that they are on track to ratify the Acquisition Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) as well.

4. (SBU) Despite the recent murder of an Armenian officer at a PfP training program in Budapest and the continued dispute with Azerbaijan over Armenia's level of attendance at the Cooperate Best Effort 04 exercises, both the MFA and MOD have maintained that Armenia is intent on further integrating into Euro-Atlantic security structures. The GOAM insists that there is no contradiction in Armenia's foreign and security policies, as the country can maintain strong defense relations with Russia while enhancing its cooperation with NATO. The signing and ratification of the NATO PfP SOFA signals continued willingness, according to Deputy Foreign Minister Tatul Margarian, to take Armenia's relations with NATO from "zero to respected partner."

WALKER